

The Brethren Evangelist.

By H. R. HOLSINGER.

"Let us go on unto Perfection."

\$1.50 Per Annum, in Advance.

VOLUME XII.

WATERLOO, IOWA. JULY 16, 1890.

NUMBER 29.

In Him Confining.

The clouds hang heavy round my way, I cannot see;
But through the darkness I believe God leadeth me.
Tis sweet to keep my hand in his, while all is dim;
To close my weary, aching eyes, and follow him.
Through many a stormy path he leads my tired feet;
Through many a path of tears I go, but it is sweet
To know that he is close to me, my God, my guide;
He leadeth me, and so I walk quite satisfied.

THE SHEPHERD AND THE SHEEP

A SERMON BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON, LONDON.

TEXT.—My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.—John x., 27-30

The Jews had said to the Savior, "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." They professed that they wanted to know more certainly concerning Him. This was a vain pretence, for He had told them all they needed to know, and they had not believed Him. Therefore He answered them to a large degree by making them know more about themselves. Sometimes the point in which a man is deficient is not as to the Gospel, but as to his own need of it. He may know all of Christ that is needful for his salvation, but he may not know enough about himself and his own lost condition; and therefore he is not in the way in which Christ becomes precious to him, because he is ignorant of his deep and terrible need. So the Savior began to talk to them, not so much about Himself as about His people, and what they were to be. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."

There are two things in my text which will suffice for our meditation. First, here is a description given of the Lord's people. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." And then, secondly, there is a privilege secured to them, namely, there everlasting, unquestionable safety.

I. First—and all that I can say will be but little, considering the largeness of the subject—let us notice the description here given of the people of God.

They are first described by a speciality of possession. "My sheep." All men are not sheep, for some are foxes, or ravening wolves, and others are compared to dogs and lions. All persons who might be called sheep are not Christ's sheep. All do not belong to His flock. All are not gathered into His fold. There is a speciality of possession. There may be many sheep, but the Savior speaks of "My sheep," those whom He chose of old, those who were given Him of the Father, those who have been bought with His blood, redeemed from among men, and in due time have been ransomed by His power; for He has bought them back from the hand of the enemy, and therefore claims them to be His own. "The Lord's portion is His people." Other lords have their portion, and Christ takes His portion. His people are the lot of His inheritance. He speaks of "My sheep" as a peculiar heritage, whom, as a shepherd, He claims for His own. Of these He is the sole owner. He is not merely their keeper, but their possessor. We read of the hireling shepherd, "whose own the sheep are not;" but, in the case of our good Shepherd, "He putteth forth His own sheep."

There is a speciality of character about them. They are "My sheep." They are dependent, timid, trembling, obedient, teachable; they are made sheep by His own Spirit. They have received a nature which is not that of the doggish world, nor that of the swinish multitude, nor that of the wolfish persecutor; but that of men indwelt of the Spirit of God, who are therefore clean, gentle, loving, gracious. He calls them "My sheep," for they have a special relation to himself, they are like Jesus. Being his sheep, he has become their guardian as well as their proprietor, and they look up to him as such. They are sheep to him, and he is a shepherd to them.

We may judge ourselves by considering whether toward Christ we are his sheep. Do we acknowledge ourselves as belonging to him, spirit, soul, and body? Do we regard ourselves as being, in relation to him, no wiser, no stronger, than sheep to a shepherd? I know some who are certainly no sheep of Christ's flock, for they will be led by nobody, in heaven or on earth, but must have their own sweet way. They are critics of the Bible, not disciples of it. They might be very good dogs, but they are very queer sheep. They

would make very respectable wolves, for they are great in destructive criticism; but they certainly are not sheep: and their temper and spirit are such that they would disdain the character, if they understood it. "What! to go where I am led?" Yes, it is even so; and hence the modern wise man is indignant, and proudly repudiates the character of a sheep. As for us, we accept all that the name implies.

A chief mark of Christ's people is attention. "My sheep hear." They can hear, because they have had spiritual ears given them. Once the Shepherd might have spoken all day long, and they would not have heard him; but it is not so now. Even from the cross our Lord's plaintive cries were all unheard by them; but now he has given them spiritual capacity and perception, and they can hear, and do hear, what his dying love would make them know and understand. Their Lord has spoken to them. "They have heard his voice, and have known it to be his; they still hear it, and they distinguish between his voice and other voices. "A stranger will they not follow; for they know not the voice of strangers." You can tell the sheep of Christ by their being marked in the ear. "My sheep hear my voice." They may not hear a good deal that other people hear; they may even be glad to be deaf to it. There are many calls exceedingly musical to carnal ears, which have no charms for them. They try to be deaf to some voices from which they could gather nothing but temptation; but they hear Christ's voice. They are all there when he speaks; their soul sits at the door to hear his softest whisper. They try to hear; they charge themselves to take heed that they lose no sound from heaven. They do hear; but they long to hear yet more completely, and to be more obedient to that voice which rings through the chambers of their soul.

Another mark of the Lord's people is intimacy. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them." "I know them." Yes, the Lord discerns them. He singles them out, for "the Lord knoweth them that are his." Sometimes we do not know them; but he says, "I know them." In cloudy times they do not know themselves; but he says, "I know them." When a child of God does not know whether he is a child of God or not, his father knows his own children, and the great Shepherd knows his own sheep. His is a discernment which never fails. The hypocrite cannot get into the true fold of Christ. He may get into the visible fold, but not into the real spiritual fold of Christ; for Christ does not know him, and bids him depart. This is the very seal upon the foundation—"The Lord knoweth them that are his." His eyes discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that feareth God and him that feareth him not; his is a knowledge of quick and certain discernment.

Now, beloved, just try a little here, to see whether you come into this number—"I know them." Does the Lord know you as his own? Has he had personal intercourse with you, and you with him? Or will he have to say to you at the last, "I never knew you?" Why, some of you have made him know you! Just as some men know right well the importunate beggar who is often at their door, so does the Lord for certain know some of you, for you go every day begging at his gate, and you receive a constant alms at his hand. Besides that, you go every day thanking him for the mercies you receive. He knows your name: the name of one who is drowned in debt to his infinite bounty.

Here is one more: actual obedience. How does he put it? "I know them and they follow me." All the Lord's sheep are marked in the foot, as well as in the ear. The foot and ear mark must be in every sheep of the Lord's flock. "They follow me." They not only say, "he is my leader," but they follow him. Christ's sheep try to follow in the track that the Shepherd marks for them. Christ's people are never so happy as when they can put down their feet where Christ put his feet down. The very marks that he has left by his bleeding footsteps we would desire to follow, all the day, and every day. Beloved, look you carefully to this! Do what Jesus did, according to your measure and power. This is what the people of God try to do. If you do not endeavor to be like Christ, you are not his sheep; for of his sheep it is true, "I know them, and they follow me."

It is not written, "They follow my commandments," though they do. It is not said, "They follow the route that I have mapped out for them," though they do that. But, "they follow me," distinctly. In their individual personality they follow their Lord in his individual personality. They have recognized himself above his words, above his ways, and even above his salvation. "They follow me," saith he. This is a grand mark of a Christian, not merely a life of morality, a life of integrity, a life of holiness, but a life of all these in connection with Christ. They follow him, not holiness, nor morality, nor integrity, apart from Christ, but they follow their Lord. A good life is good in any man. We cannot speak evil of virtue, even when we find it in the ordinary moralist; but this is not the complete mark of Christ's sheep. The virtues of Christ's sheep are in connection with himself. The Christian is holy, and all that, but that is because he follows his perfect master, and keeps close to him. This is one of the peculiar and unfailing marks of the child of God.

II. But my main object tonight is to show you the great privilege here conferred on the people of God. Christ has secured to them the priceless boon of eternal security in him. No sheep of Christ shall ever be lost. None that he has purchased with his blood, and made to be his own, shall ever wander away so as to perish at last. This is the doctrine of the verses now before us. At any rate, if I wanted to express that doctrine, I could not find words in which I could set it forth more definitely or more completely than is done by the words before me.

The security of the people of God lies, first of all, in the character of the life which they have received. Listen to this: "And I give unto them eternal life." All the spiritual life which all the sheep in the flock now possess has been given to them by their Shepherd. Never was there another flock of which this could be said. No shepherd but this one can give life to his sheep; but he gave them all the true life that they have. Nay, stop; he not only gave them life, but he sustains that life by a constant gift. Observe, it is not written, "I gave to them eternal life," but "I give unto them eternal life." They are always living by virtue of the life which he is always giving. They are constantly receiving life from him, according to that assurance: "Because I live, ye shall live also." What he always gives they must receive, and therefore it cannot cease.

Notice the nature of that life. "I give unto my sheep eternal life." Now, you all know what "eternal" means; or say, rather, none of you can form an idea of eternity which can grasp all its length of endurance. Only this, you know it has no end, and cannot therefore close. If anybody said that he had eternal life and lost it, he would be flatly contradicting himself. It could not be eternal, or else he must still have it. If it is eternal, it is eternal, and there is no end to it; and there is an end of further argument about it. If the life that Christ gives us, when we are born again, can die, it is not "eternal" life, or else words have ceased to have any meaning at all.

But, principally, I dwell upon the glorious character of the giver. "I give unto my sheep eternal life." The life that Christ gives is not that poor, paltry life which lasts the professor for about three weeks, and then dwindles down and dies out; or, say, three months, and then the revival is over, and the convert is spun out and done for, and has to begin again. Such is the religious life which is excited by men; but it is not so with the life which comes from God. He that is born again, according to the scripture, has received eternal life; and this is the only life worth receiving.

Now, depend upon it, it is what you hold out to people that has much to do with how they behave themselves afterwards. Tell them that if they believe in Christ, they are going to get, not eternal life, but life for a little while, life for as long as they take good care of it, and I fear it will prove to be so. It may do them good to get the poor little change you offer them; but as surely as they are converted to a temporary life, they will die out before long. You told them that they would. You did not propose any more to them. But when you propose to them this: "Here is everlasting life to be had by believing in Christ. It is not temporary, but eternal life"—why, then